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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study was to begin evaluating the effectiveness of the University of Utah's counseling center's integrated didactic-experiential Efficient Study group treatment. It was also an attempt to provide further evidence concerning the questions of the efficacy of short-term group counseling procedures with academic underachievers or low achievers and the effect of probationary status on students subsequent academic performance. A total of 120 students on academic probation were screened for desire to participate in Efficient Study groups. A group of 25 students were then assigned to an Efficient Study Group and 14 to a control group. Results included: (1) a greater percentage of non-counseled probationary students withdrew from school or received failing grades than those in the study group, (2) study group students showed a higher significant improvement than no-treatment groups, and (3) the efficacy of probationary status is questionable as a "treatment" procedure. (Author/CJ)

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EFFECTING ACADEMIC RECOVERY: AN EFFICIENT STUDY PROGRAM PILOT STUDY

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EFFECTING ACADEMIC RECOVERY: AN EFFICIENT STUDY PROGRAM PILOT STUDY

The Counseling Center's Efficient Study Program grew out of a deep concern for the academic underachiever, particularly the probationary student. It is an attempt to provide meaningful and effective help for a class of students who reflect significant educational and social problems.

The academic underachiever represents a population where the target behavior for treatment change is easy to define and measure: improvement in grade-point average. Yet, the results of studies evaluating group treatment procedures designed to effect academic recovery are not encouraging. A review of published evaluations of study-skills courses indicates that a classroom approach is often followed by improvement (Entwisle, 1960). However, as Entwisle points out, "overall judgment about the benefit accruing from these courses needs to be tempered somewhat. . .by awareness that negative results are much less apt to be published than positive results" (p. 250). For example, an unpublished investigation of the study-skills course (Educational Psychology 42) at the University of Utah by Stone and Jester (1969) produced consistently negative findings. After examing grade-point data for all freshmen who registered for the course during a five year period, Stone and Jester concluded that the course did not enhance academic performance.

Group counseling techniques, while suggesting potential, have not been empirically supported with any degree of regularity (LeMay, 1967). In fact, most research on group counseling with underachievers has failed to demon-

strate significant positive change (Gilbreath, 1967), and several studies suggest that group counseling may tend, if anything, to lower rather than raise grades (e.g., Baymur and Patterson, 1960; Winborn and Schmidt, 1961). Evidence concerning the probationary student or low achiever is particularly discouraging. Fisher (1967a, 1967b) has found that students placed on academic probation tend to make somewhat higher grades in following semesters. However, other relevent research indicates that short-term group counseling is not likely to effect any significant improvement in grade-point average (e.g., Maroney, 1962; Preus, 1965).

Perhaps one of the reasons why group procedures have had, at best, limited success in effecting academic recovery is that they have tended to be an either-or phenomenon; either a cognitive-didactic or an affective-experiential treatment. It seems that group leaders have tended to be study-skills experts (i.e., teachers) without sufficient training as counselors or counselors without sufficient specific training (or desire?) to help students learn effective, sophisticated study-skills.

A perusal of reviews (Nosal, 1968; Taylor, 1964; Wellington and Wellington, 1965) summarizing the findings of numerous investigators on the characteristics of underachievers, including students on probation, yielded the following conclusions: (1) underachievers show a high incidence of personal-social adjustment problems, differing significantly as a group from students in general; (2) underachievers tend to differ as a group from students in general by being less realistic and less clear in outlook, both in terms of immediate educational-vocational planning and long-range goal orientation; and (3) underachievers show considerable within-group variation on personal-social adjustment dimensions.

It seems reasonable to conclude that a group treatment program designed to effect academic recovery must, to be optimally successful, be sensitive to and concerned with the above characteristics. There is evidence which suggests that "counselor-structured" group procedures emphasizing material and experiences based upon such "a priori diagnostic conclusions" are apt to be more successful than "group-structured" procedures (e.g., Chestnut, 1965). Such a program would, in addition to helping students learn and develop effective study habits and skills, help students deal effectively with issues of educational-vocational involvement and problems of personal-social adjustment. The groups would have to be small enough and the procedure flexible enough to meet the varying personal-social adjustment needs of an underachieving population. An integrated approach would be needed, combining didactic presentation of specific study methods and materials with group discussion centering around issues of educational-vocational involvement and affective group experiences.

The Counseling Center's Efficient Study treatment is such a program. Its objective is to help students achieve maximum individual success in higher education by helping them develop a combination of study-skills and personal characteristics which will make that success possible (see Appendix I).

PROBLEM

The primary purpose of this study was to begin evaluating the effectiveness of the Counseling Center's integrated didactic-experiential Efficient Study group treatment. It was also an attempt to provide further evidence concerning the questions of the efficacy of short-term group counseling

procedures with academic underachievers or low achievers and the effect of probationary status on students' subsequent academic performance.

Specifically, the questions which the study attempted to answer were:

1. Will students placed on academic probation show a significant improvement in grade-point average (GPA) regardless of whether or not they receive Efficient Study group counseling?

2. Will students placed on academic probation who received Efficient Study Group counseling have significantly higher grade-point averages (GPA's) and show a significant positive change in grade-point average (GPA) when compared with probationary students who did not receive Efficient Study Group counseling?

METHOD

Subjects

The Counseling Center received 240 referral letters (see Appendix II) from the Scholastic Standards Committee prior to the beginning of autumn quarter, 1968. These letters represented students who had been placed on academic probation at the end of spring quarter, 1968; summer quarter, 1968; or who were returning to the University on probationary status. Each of these students received an initial "screening group" appointment with the Counseling Center during the first week of autumn quarter, 1968. The students who kept their scheduled appointment met in small groups with a counselor who responded to the students' expressed concerns and explained the Counseling Center's Efficient Study Program and the Center's other available services. During this "screening group" experience the students had an opportunity to (1) indicate their desire to participate in an Efficient Study group, (2) indicate their desire to receive individual counseling, or (3) indicate that they did not wish to participate (see Apprendix III).

Sixty-nine students (29% of the 240 Scholastic Standards referrals) kept their scheduled appointment with the Counseling Center. Of these 69, 55 (80%) indicated a desire to participate while 14 (20%) chose not to get involved. Of the 55 who chose involvement, 42 were assigned to Efficient Study groups and 13 requested individual counseling. Only 25 of the 42 students who were assigned to Efficient Study groups actually showed up for the initial group meeting and attended subsequent sessions, leaving 17 who did not follow through.

Treatment Group: The 25 students who attended the group sessions comprised the treatment group. Their cumulative pre-treatment GPA's ranged from .50 to 1.87, with a mean of 1.57.[1]

Control Group I: Of the 17 students who did not follow through, after having expressed a desire to receive Efficient Study group counseling, three were never registered for autumn quarter, 1968. The remaining 14 students comprised the first control group. This group included three students who attended an initial Efficient Study group session or two but who later dropped out. This group had cumulative GPA's ranging from .83 to 1.88, with a mean of 1.54.

Control Group II: The students in this group were those who, having attended the "screening group" meeting, chose not to participate. All were registered for autumn quarter, 1968. The 14 cumulative GPA's ranged from .12 to 1.89, with a mean of 1.52.

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[1]Letter grades at the University of Utah correspond to the following quantitative grade-point equivalents: A=4.00, B=3.00, C+=2.40, C=2.00, C-=1.60, D=1.00, E=0.00.

Control Group III: Using a random numbers table, a random sample of 50 students was drawn from the list of 171 referrals who failed to keep their scheduled appointment. Of these 50 who failed to make contact with the Counseling Center, one-half were registered for autumn quarter, 1968. The 25 GPA's for this group ranged from .00 to 1.88, with a mean of 1.64.

The average autumn quarter, 1968, course loads for the treatment group and control groups I, II, and III were 11.56, 12.50, 10.92, and 11.90 quarter hours, respectively.

Procedure

The 25 probationary students who participated in the Efficient Study Program were assigned to four different counseling groups based upon their time availabilities. Each group, ranging from 5 to 8 members, met twice weekly over a period of eight weeks for a total of 16 sessions of approximately one-hour each. Group attendance ranged from 50% to 100% with a median of 13 contacts. A single counselor, trained to handle the integrated didactic-experiential Efficient Study group approach, provided the treatment conditions.

Measures

Two measures were used to analyze the effect of the treatment conditions: (1) a GPA obtained by the students during the quarter post-treatment; and (2) a pre-post difference score obtained by taking the difference per student between his pre-treatment cumulative GPA and his GPA obtained during the quarter post-treatment.

RESULTS

The number of subjects involved in the study by treatment and control

groups, with the number withdrawing during the quarter and the number receiving failing grades during the quarter post-treatment, is presented in Table 1. A greater percentage of the non-counseled probationary students withdrew from school or received failing grades than did those students who experienced Efficient Study group counseling.

Table 2 contains the findings relevant to the question, asking if students placed on academic probation would show a significant improvement in GPA regardless of whether or not they experienced Efficient Study group counseling. Using pre- and post-treatment GPA's, *t* tests for the difference between means obtained from the same group on two occasions were calculated. Examination of Table 2 indicates that the probationary students who received Efficient Study group counseling did show a highly significant improvement. The three no-treatment groups, while showing positive trends, failed to show a statistically significant improvement.

Table 3 presents the results of an analysis of GPA differences between the probationary students receiving Efficient Study group counseling and the probationary students receiving no treatment. Do Efficient Study subjects have significantly higher GPA's and show a significant improvement when compared with the non-counseled students? Using post-treatment GPA's and pre-post difference scores, *t* tests were calculated. The findings comparing Efficient Study subjects with students who expressed a desire to participate but who did not follow through (Control I) support an affirmative answer at the .05 level on both outcome measures. The data comparing Efficient Study subjects with students who chose not to participate (Control II) and students who failed to make contact (Control III) do not support

TABLE 1

Attrition for Academic Probation Students Receiving
Efficient Study Group Treatment or No Treatment

	Number of Subjects	Number of Withdrawals	Number with Failing GPA's	Total Number Withdrawing or Failing
EFFICIENT STUDY[a]	25	0	9	9 (36%)
CONTROL I[b]	14	1	8	9 (64%)
CONTROL II[c]	14	1	5	6 (43%)
CONTROL III[d]	25	3	13	16 (64%)

a Students who experienced the Counseling Center's integrated didactic-experiential Efficient Study group counseling treatment.

b Non-counseled students who expressed a desire to participate in the Efficient Study Program.

c Non-counseled students who chose not to participate in the Efficient Study Program.

d Non-counseled students who failed to make contact with the Counseling Center.

TABLE 2

Academic Probation Students Receiving Efficient Study Group Treatment or No Treatment: Pre-Post Comparisons

	Mean GPA Pre	Mean GPA Post	Mean Pre-Post Difference	SD (Diff.)	t (correlated)	p*
EFFICIENT STUDY[a]	1.57	2.07	.50	.66	3.77	<.001
CONTROL I[b]	1.54	1.65	.11	.57	.70	ns
CONTROL II[c]	1.52	1.95	.43	1.02	1.55	ns
CONTROL III[d]	1.64	1.84	.20	.93	1.04	ns

Note.--Mean GPA Pre was computed using cumulative grade-poing averages; mean GPA Post was computed using autumn quarter, 1968, grades. The analysis does not include five control subjects who withdrew from school during the quarter.

a Students who experienced the Counseling Center's integrated didactic-experiential Efficient Study group counseling treatment (N=25).

b Non-counseled students who expressed a desire to participate in the Efficient Study Program (N=13).

c Non-counseled students who chose not to participate in the Efficient Study Program (N=13).

d Non-counseled students who failed to make contact with the Counseling Center (N=22).

*One-tailed test.

TABLE 3

t Tests on Outcome Between Efficient Study Group Treatment and No Treatment Groups

	Mean GPA Pre	Mean GPA Post	SD	Mean Diff.	SD	Mean GPA Post t	p*	Pre-Post Difference t	p*
EFFICIENT STUDY[a] vs. CONTROL I[b]	1.57 1.54	2.07 1.65	.62 .62	.50 .11	.66 .57	2.10	<.05	1.89	<.05
EFFICIENT STUDY vs. CONTROL II[c]	1.57 1.52	2.07 1.95	.62 .87	.50 .43	.66 1.02	.46	ns	.20	ns
EFFICIENT STUDY[d] vs. CONTROL III	1.57 1.64	2.07 1.84	.62 .70	.50 .20	.66 .93	1.05	ns	1.23	ns

Note.--Mean GPA Pre was computed using cumulative grade-point averages; mean GPA Post was computed using autumn quarter, 1968, grades. The analysis does not include five control subjects who withdrew from school during the quarter.

a Students who experienced the Counseling Center's integrated didactic-experiential Efficient Study group counseling treatment (N=25).

b Non-counseled students who expressed a desire to participate in the Efficient Study Program (N=13).

c Non-counseled students who chose not to participate in the Efficient Study Program (N=13).

d Non-counseled students who failed to make contact with the Counseling Center (N=22).

*One-tailed test.

an affirmative answer at a statistically significant level. However, it may be noted that all of the between-group comparisons are consistently in favor of the Efficient Study Treatment group.

DISCUSSION

The present data offer support for the notion that a short-term integrated didactic-experiential group counseling experience can help students realize an "academic recovery." A smaller percentage of the probationary students who received Efficient Study Group counseling withdrew from school or sustained failing grades than the non-counseled probationary students. Probationary students receiving Efficient Study group counseling achieved a significantly higher GPA and showed a significantly greater improvement in GPA than non-counseled probationary students who had expressed a desire for treatment. While the non-counseled students who rejected help or who did not respond to a help offer did show some positive change in GPA, there was a definite and consistent trend toward higher achievement and greater improvement on the part of the students receiving Efficient Study group counseling.

An additional phenomenon observed was the greater GPA variability shown by control groups II and III on both outcome measures (see Table 3). One way of assessing the greater variability is in terms of the initial difference between the treatment-control I and control II-control III populations; they responded to a help offer in different ways. The relatively low variability groups (treatment and control I) expressed a desire to participate in the Efficient Study Program while the high variability groups (control II and control III) did not indicate a desire to participate.

It is interesting to note that the incentive effect of probationary status on students' subsequent achievement level was moderate (statistically insignificant). This finding is not in support of Fisher's (1967a, 1967b) data which suggested that the experience of academic probation does motivate students to improve their grades significantly. Obviously, some students respond to the probationary status "stimulus." However, the present data suggest that the efficacy of probationary status as a "treatment" procedure is questionable, particulary for those students who recognize their condition and are willing to respond to a help offer.

On the other hand, it would appear that an adequate short-term integrated didactic-experiential group counseling service (in combination with probationary status) could have considerable educational significance. It appears that with such a service available to all students placed on probation, the attrition rate at the University could be reduced without any lowering of academic standards. A replication of this pilot study is, of course, needed. An analysis of data accumulated over the entire 1968-69 academic year is planned.

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Appendix I

Counseling Center
EFFICIENT STUDY PROGRAM

GROUP EXPERIENCE OUTLINE

I. EDUCATIONAL-VOCATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

- A. SELF-ASSESSMENT
- B. SELF-CONFIDENCE
- C. CONCEPT OF WORK/SCHOOL
- D. TIME SCHEDULING
- E. SCHOLASTIC MOTIVATION
- F. EDUCATIONAL-VOCATIONAL GOALS

II. PERSONAL-SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT

- A. ATTITUDES AND VALUES
- B. SELF-CONCEPT
- C. SOCIALIZATION, MATURITY, and RESPONSIBILITY
- D. OTHER PROBLEMS OF ADJUSTMENT

III. STUDY HABITS AND SKILLS

- A. RETENTION AND FORGETTING
- B. TEXTBOOK READING AND STUDY
- C. EXAMINATIONS
- D. LISTENING AND NOTETAKING
- E. LIBRARY USAGE AND TERM PAPERS

Appendix II

THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

SALT LAKE CITY 84112

SCHOLASTIC STANDARDS COMMITTEE
110 PARK BUILDING

You previously received a pamphlet that described common causes of academic difficulties. It outlined some steps that can be taken to overcome such problems. The pamphlet suggested, among other things, that you discuss your educational plans with a counselor at the Counseling Center.

Assuming you have been unable as yet to follow-up this suggestion, we have arranged an interview for you in the hope that this will prove helpful. If it is not possible for you to be at the Counseling Center at the time indicated below, please call the Center immediately (at 322-6826) and make a more convenient appointment.

You will initially visit with a counselor in company with a small group of students who have had academic experiences similar to your own. If you would prefer an individual interview, please feel free to phone the above number and request a private appointment.

Sincerely yours,

James D. McMahon

James D. McMahon, Chairman
Scholastic Standards Committee

Your Counselor: _____

Place: Counseling Center, 2120 Annex Building, (2nd floor of "B" Wing)

Date: _____ Time: _____

CC-I

Appendix III

UNIVERSITY OF UTAH
COUNSELING CENTER
EFFICIENT STUDY PROGRAM

Name_____Social Security Number_____

Address_____Phone_____

The Counseling Center has developed a special service for students who wish to increase their scholastic efficiency. The Efficient Study Program is designed to help a student make wise decisions with respect to his educational-vocational future, and to develop the personal characteristics and skills which will enable him to study and learn more effectively.

☐ EFFICIENT STUDY GROUPS: These small groups are primarily designed to help people who have common difficulties in scheduling their time, developing good study habits, test-taking skills and other skills directly related to learning and retention. However, the groups go beyond learning skill problems. They involve discussions with a counselor centered around problems of adjustment to the university environment such as understanding oneself and the University, fear of failure, developing educational-vocational goals, attitudes and values, or any other personal-social-emotional issue which may affect scholastic performance.

Times:_____

☐ INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING: This is for people who would prefer to deal with any of the above problem areas with an individual counselor

☐ I do not wish to participate in the Efficient Study Program.

If you have indicated a desire to become involved in the Efficient Study Program, please fill out the schedule below. Put an X in those spaces where you are free to participate.

TIME:	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	SAT.
8-9						
9-10						
10-11						
11-12						
12-1						
1-2						
2-3						
3-4						